

AIRGRAM

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ANALYSIS & DISTRIBUTION
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FROM: Amconsul IZMIR

DATE: November 16, 1962

SUBJECT: Izmir Attitudes on Cuban Situation.

REF

The outbreak of the Cuban crisis came as much as a surprise and aroused the same intensity of interest in Izmir as it did elsewhere in Turkey. Completely eclipsing interest in domestic developments, it was the subject of wide discussion even among the lowliest inhabitants of Izmir who ordinarily would not manifest any particular interest in foreign affairs. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of local reactions to the outbreak of the crisis was the near-uniformity of opinion on the subject, there being little significant difference evident between the attitudes of intellectual and illiterate groups. The U.S. action in placing a quarantine around the island against offensive weapons had almost universal approval. This forceful military counter to an aggressive Soviet design captured the imagination of Izmiris as have few international developments in recent years. This action coupled with the mild Soviet response to it was regarded not only as a great victory for the United States but also as a victory for the Western powers, including Turkey. One could sense in the enthusiasm of the reaction to these developments a feeling of identification with the West in much greater degree than is normally manifest. Probably most enthusiastic in applauding the initial U.S. action on Cuba were Turkish military officers, some of whom felt that the U.S. had not been opposing the Soviet Union forcefully enough in recent years.

Among numerous comments forthcoming, only two contained any reservations about the U.S. quarantine action and this was on the day the news of the quarantine broke. The reservations expressed were that the quarantine (which was first reported in Izmir as a complete blockade) probably violated the principle of freedom of the seas.

Although the Izmir press in bold headlines conveyed the impression

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that the world was on the brink of an atomic war and thus generated a certain amount of excitement; there was a surprisingly little apprehension over the possibility of war. Many reasoned that the Soviets were not prepared to risk a war over Cuba. Others displayed an attitude of resignation toward the possibility of war, one line of reasoning expressed being "If there is going to be a war, we might as well have it now."

The Izmir press has generally echoed popular opinion on the Cuban situation. Izmir's two pro-JP newspapers have treated Cuban developments with such headlines as "Kennedy's Great Victory" ... "How Khrushchev Came to His Knees". In an editorial, one of these newspapers referring to the turnaround of Soviet ships, maintained this demonstrated Kennedy was the most far-sighted statesman of the century. The RPP press, while giving favorable treatment to the U.S. action, has not matched the enthusiastic approval of the JP press (RPP sources outside the press, however, have been no less approving than JP sources). On the other hand, although the RPP press has on occasion in the past defended Castro, there has been no trace of this in their present comment on the Cuban situation.

The Soviet reaction thus far to the recent U.S. moves on Cuba has generally been interpreted locally as an indication of Soviet weakness in the face of superior U.S. strength. Along this line there has been no tendency to credit Khrushchev with being a man of peace for retreating in a crisis of his own making. Beginning with the first reports of Khrushchev's letter to President Kennedy, there has been a tendency to conclude that the crisis was over. Various better educated sources, on the other hand, although conceding that the crisis was eased, did not jump to the conclusion that it was over, and expressed suspicions that the Soviet Union's apparent surrender in agreeing to remove its missiles from Cuba might be based on the assumption that they could cheat on this commitment and get away with it or that the Soviets had plans for applying pressure against the West elsewhere, thereby at least partly compensating for the loss of face entailed by their backdown in Cuba. Turkey, as might be expected, was considered as one of the most likely points where it might be applied. In this connection, it is interesting that one source, well-informed on foreign affairs, considered it a possibility that the United States might actually agree to a dismantling of U.S. missile sites in Turkey because he doubted whether they were of much value in view of the U.S. arsenal of Polaris missiles.

As the crisis has eased and as U.S.-Soviet negotiations have dragged out, interest in the Cuban situation has dropped off sharply. As a result of the failure of a strong Soviet reaction to materialize by this time, even those who were anticipating one have begun to conclude that none will be forthcoming. Some local sources now predict that the Soviet Union, out of increasing concern over Red China's strength and intentions, will probably seek to better its relations with the West. Persons who still follow the Cuban situation with interest agree that the United States is justified in pressing for the removal from Cuba of Soviet bombers as well as missiles and believe that the Soviets in the end will give in on this point, too.

Probably the most lasting effect in this area of the Cuban crisis has been a significant increase in U.S. prestige and that of President Kennedy, personally, and a corresponding decline in respect for Soviet military and diplomatic capabilities. The President's resolute action in the crisis has reinforced the image of him as an energetic, dynamic but at the same time, prudent leader who is more than a match for Khrushchev. As a result, there is now a more optimistic outlook on the whole international situation.

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